

# TRANSITIONS

A Twenty-One Day Study to Deal With Transitions of Life

## INTRODUCTION

God gave me this Bible study in January, 2014, as Tommy and I were beginning a year of tremendous changes in our lives and the lives of our family. He was retiring at the end of March and I was transitioning toward retirement in my real estate business. We had prayed for about three years asking God to put together our retirement the way He wanted it put together, and He went beyond what we would have ever imagined as the plans He had unfolded before us were so much better than we would have ever designed ourselves. It really was that “immeasurably more” that only God offers. (Ephesians 3:20) We wanted desperately to respond by doing our part well, to the very best of the ability He could give us.

We never really planned to "retire," we just planned to transition from customary work into more of a full-time ministry made up of different ministries that will allow us to concentrate more on serving God by serving others in more of a concentrated way than our jobs had allowed us to do. Even though we were able to serve God and others through our jobs, there's so much more we wanted to do that we'll be able to do in this new chapter.

Over the three years of our asking God what He wanted our retirement years to look like, we felt Him leading us to do more extended mission trips. We had done many one- or two-week mission trips, but we knew there was so much more we could do when we had the opportunity to stay for extended periods of time. So for a while we thought that we'd do two- or three-month mission trips and then go home, get in a motor home, and go spend time with Christie and Brett and Kristin and the girls. However, God had unfolded only a part of His plan at that time.

We had done many mission trips to Roatan, Honduras, and we felt God telling us to do extended trips there where we had already begun working with people in various communities on the island. We felt, though, that there was a second place where he wanted us to do mission trips, but He had not revealed it yet when we went with Brett and some members of the church he pastored in South Carolina to Calgary, Alberta, in July, 2013. After two days in Calgary, we knew that was the other place God wanted us to serve Him. We knew that He wanted us to spend the summers helping with mission teams there as there were so many people who didn't know Jesus. We asked the pastor of the church there if he would be interested in our going up there for the summers and he assured us that would be great for them, that there were several places we could be used. We had no idea at that time that God had just revealed to Brett and Kristin that He was calling them to move there to plant a church! We found that out about three days after talking with the pastor. Then we returned to Georgia and the next week, Christie told us that God was calling her to go to Roatan for a year to work with special needs children! We were astounded and thrilled! Instead of doing our mission trips and returning to visit with our children and grandchildren, we would be spending the mission trips WITH them, serving alongside them. How exciting is that!

As we began the year of transition, a new chapter of our lives, we thought it would be a good idea to do a 21-day Daniel fast and pray that God would prepare us for this new chapter. He was obviously doing His part and we wanted to be sure that we would do our part well and as effectively as we could. We knew this would be a rewarding and insightful 21 days. I was encouraged to do this by my dear friend Oma Millwood, who does this regularly and who experiences a heightened level of God's work in her life as a result. I'm so glad we followed her advice! Her pastor, Jentezen Franklin, leads the congregation at Free Chapel in various fasts throughout each year and they have experienced tremendous spiritual growth and works of God as a result. Our pastor, Jeff Crook, had also encouraged our congregation to add fasting to our prayer life. I appreciate the leadership of our pastors in promoting seeking God at a higher level if we want higher-level results.

When I began the first day of the fast, I prayed throughout the day that God would show me how to organize my thoughts and prayers during these 21 days. This is what God gave me:

The first seven days, I would focus on asking God to prepare my heart. The second seven days, I would focus on asking Him to direct our steps. The third seven days, I would ask Him to give me more passion for Him and for serving Him. Whatever God leads me to do, I want to do it with passion, with my whole heart.

I'm happy to share this with you and I'm praying that God will use it to speak to you as He did to me.

## WEEK ONE - PREPARE MY HEART

### DAY 1

Psalm 51:10 says, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew that steadfast spirit within me.*" I don't have a pure or clean heart on my own. I have to rely on God to cleanse me of all the unrighteousness in my heart. The first step of preparing my heart is to clean it. As Pastor Jeff Crook pointed out in a sermon around the beginning of our fast, a pure heart is a prerequisite to a powerful prayer life. Picturing the cleaning of a house in preparation for the arrival of guests, I think about how I would sweep out or vacuum the dirt, wipe off the dust, and remove the clutter. The dirt represents what we bring into our home from the outside that is obviously out of place. It's what we pick up on our feet when we walk on unclean surfaces. It correlates with the dirt that we bring into our heart when we go places we shouldn't go, think thoughts we shouldn't think, or look at things we shouldn't look at. The dust represents the particles that are in the air that just settle on surfaces. It correlates with the dust that we get on our hearts and minds just from living in the world. Some things we can't escape from; they're just part of living on the earth. The clutter in our hearts, like the clutter in our homes, is made up of the things that are either out of place (have the wrong priority) or just unnecessary.

Today we will focus on cleaning out the dirt (sins) in our hearts.

James 1:21 says, "*Therefore, ridding yourselves of all moral filth and evil excess, humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save you.*" Notice what must come before receiving the Word—"ridding yourselves of all moral filth and evil excess." Tommy has demonstrated this in Bible study classes over the years by taking a flash light that's turned on and placing his hand in front of it to block out most of the light and stated that this is what sin does to our fellowship with God—it blocks it. Confession and repentance are mandatory ongoing practices if we want to experience unhindered fellowship with God and see His hand on our lives. We can't just "do life" our way and expect to receive God's blessing and direction.

From the verse above, consider for a few moments what the meaning of "*moral filth and evil excess*" is in your life. Our society has come to accept sins as normal that in generations past were looked upon with disdain. Even we Christians have become desensitized to things that God looks on as evil. Therefore, ask God to hold up all that fills your heart against the plumb line of His will and His Word. Then ask Him for an open mind that's willing to hear what He says to you.

Jeremiah 17:5-10 says, "*Thus says the Lord: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.'*" Are we really willing to

be like a “*shrub in the desert*” when we can be like a “*tree planted by the waters*”? Think about what God means when He says, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind...*” We don’t really know our own heart, He is the only one who knows what fills our heart and we must look to Him to reveal our heart to us. For this reason, then, we can’t just do our own search of our heart and trust our evaluation. We must ask God to search our heart and reveal sins to us, to remove the blinders that we’ve allowed to be there because of what others think and do. It amazes me how at this very time in history, so many people who call themselves Christians are accepting behaviors that the Bible clearly calls sins. How have we veered so far off the path of the laws of Almighty God? How can we possibly consider our own ideas or thoughts as superior to the God of the universe who created all things and all people? We know that those who don’t know God will judge behaviors from their own minds, their own perceptions, but we cannot follow that pattern if we want to be obedient to God. This is equivalent to the dust that just settles on us from living in this world, but that can become dirt if we absorb those non-truths. We need to shake the dust off our feet in refusal to accept the world’s ideas and actions.

Looking at concepts from God’s point of view rather than our own begins with looking at ourselves from His point of view. A common question people ask today is, “What do you think of God?” However, a better question is, “What does God think of me?” After all, that’s the question that will determine our eternity. Therefore, as you examine your heart, let it come from a perspective of God’s evaluation of you, your thoughts, desires, behaviors, etc.

Psalm 51:17 says, “*The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. God, You will not despise a broken and humbled heart.*” The transition from sin to righteousness must involve brokenness and humility. As we ask God to search our heart, it’s important that we do it in humility, being willing and open for Him to reveal to us what He wants us to see. Once we see the sins that He reveals to us, it is important that we confess those sins (agree with Him) and repent (turn from them). It must be a desire of your heart and a determination to turn away from those sins. This step cannot be flippant or casual. As the above verse says, it must come from a broken spirit, a broken and humbled heart.

Examine: Ask God to show you how He sees your heart. Psalm 139:23 says, “*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*” Ask God what traits need to be cleansed from your heart, to point them out so you can ask for His help as you begin the cleansing process. Ask Him questions such as, “Am I doing what You want me to do?” “What actions am I doing that are not in line with Your will for me?” “Are my motives pure for doing what You want me to do?” Here are some examples of sins that may be present in our hearts: selfishness, pride, anger, impatience, arrogance, materialism, vanity, sinful acts, and impure motives, among many others. As God reveals an unrighteous trait to you, ask Him to take it away and give you a desire to replace it with His character that is its opposite.

Pray: Lord, please take my selfishness and give me a desire to put You and others before my own self and my desires. Take my pride and give me more of a realization that all the good that I can be and do comes only from You. I can do nothing effectively and of eternal value on my own. Please take my anger and short-temper and give me patience and longsuffering. Take my

arrogance, like my pride, and make me sensitive to Your work in my life and help me realize that at the foot of the cross, no one is better than anyone else. Take my materialism, my desire for the things of this world that offer nothing of lasting value, and give me a heart that seeks You and what matters to You. Lord, I do want to rid my heart of all its unrighteousness. Please reveal that unrighteousness to me and lead me in confession and repentance and cleanse me of all my unrighteousness. Then, and only then, can I be a vessel that can be used by You. In Jesus' precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* 1 John 1:9

## **DAY 2**

Consider for a few minutes what God said to you yesterday as you asked Him to search your heart and reveal any unrighteousness. It would be good to journal what you learned from this exercise. Think about the sins God revealed to you. Then think about all the ministry activities you do and consider if you have any impure motives for doing them. If we perform activities for God with impure motives, we might as well not perform those activities. Did you find any beliefs you have that do not line up with God's Word?

As you examined your heart yesterday, asking God to reveal all the unrighteousness present and you confessed those sins and repented, were most of the sins God brought to your mind sins of commission or sins of omission? We tend to think more often of the sins of commission, the things we do that are sinful. However, God looks just as seriously at sins of omission, the things He tells us to do that we fail to do. For example, He may have asked you to share Him with a co-worker and you refused. He may have asked you to do some act of kindness for someone and you didn't verbalize your refusal, but you never made time to do it. Ask God to show you times that He asked you to do something that you failed to do. Confess those sins and repent with humility.

Read carefully the following passages that deal with our hearts and meditate on each one as it applies to your life:

Deuteronomy 30:6 – *"The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul and live."* How are the hearts of your descendants affected by your heart? It's likely that if we treasure God's commands and obey them, our children will, as well. On the other hand, we have all seen what happens to children's behaviors many times when their parents do not follow God's commands. Imagine facing God one day and having to answer for not only our own failures, but also our children's failures that were a result of our own. If our hearts become callous to God's commands, it is a very serious thing for generations to come. At my daddy's funeral, one of the preachers, Dr. Randy Turner, made the point that my daddy would not be judged at his death, but would be judged at the end of this age. He said that the reason for that was that he would be rewarded for not only what he did, but he would also be rewarded for what his children, grandchildren, and all his descendants did to follow through with truths he taught us. He emphasized to my brother and me and our children the importance of living according to biblical

truths my daddy taught us. That was a convicting command that I will never forget because my daddy taught us a lot from God's Word.

I Kings 11:4 – *“As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.”*

How have we allowed those around us to lead us astray from God's will for us so that we have become not fully devoted to God? This can be such a subtle and gradual thing that it's sometimes hard to realize.

II Chronicles 12:14 – *“He did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the Lord.”*

Obedying God is an intentional act; it doesn't happen without setting our heart on Him. Many people may not decide consciously to turn their backs on God, but it happens because they don't make the intentional decision to seek Him.

Psalm 66:18 – *“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;”*

Like the illustration of the flashlight mentioned yesterday, sin present in our heart blocks our fellowship with God and causes us to miss out on His blessing on our life. We cannot cherish sin and cherish God's will at the same time.

Psalm 119:36 – *“Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain.”* The root problem with disobedience is selfishness—we want what we want. This prayer is one we should all write on the tablet of our heart and pray every day.

Read the following passages and consider the benefits of a heart that seeks God.

Ezekiel 11:19-20 – *“I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.”*

Psalm 37:4 – *“Take delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.”*

Psalm 37:31 – *“The law of their God is in their hearts; their feet do not slip.”*

Psalm 84:5 – *“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.”*

Psalm 119:11 – *“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”*

Examine: Continue asking God to reveal to you any unrighteousness in your heart and tell Him of your desire to follow His commands and live according to His will and not your own. Ask yourself if you are truly willing to give up your own desires and set your heart on seeking God and His will for every facet of your life. If you can't truthfully answer that you are, then ask Him to give you that desire.

Prayer: Lord, I praise You as the only true and living God of the universe, my creator and my sustainer. Please search my heart and reveal any unrighteousness and lead me in confession and

repentance. Show me sins of omission as well as sins of commission. Give me a broken spirit over my sins so that I don't look lightly on my disobedience. Help me to understand the seriousness of my sins and the benefits of following You. Please give me a desire to live in a way that is pleasing to You and that brings a smile to Your face because what You think of me matters more to me than what anyone else thinks of me. I love You and praise You for who You are. In Jesus' precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: "*Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.*" Psalm 84:5. Consider throughout the day how God blesses the life of the one whose heart is set on Him and His will.

### **DAY 3**

Now that we've identified the "dirt" and "dust" that must be removed from our hearts and we've focused on those sins, asking God to remove them, we will turn our focus on the qualities of God that we're asking Him to give us in place of those sinful desires and attitudes. Galatians 5:22-25 says, "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*" We tend to focus more on the fruit described in this passage than the source of this fruit; notice the first few words, "*the fruit of the Spirit is...*" This Spirit is that of God the Father and His Son. So if God and Jesus possess this fruit, we should desire them, as well, and we should depend on the Spirit of God to provide this fruit. This is not something we can produce on our own.

If we're going to ask God to replace our unrighteousness with His character, let's look at these traits that are part of His character.

Love - "*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*" (John 13:35) If we really love others, we will be kind to them, we'll forgive them when they wrong us, we won't talk negatively about them to others, we'll put their needs and desires before our own, we will serve them.

Joy - John 17 records a prayer that Jesus prayed for His believers. Verse 13 of this prayer says, "*But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.*" John 15:11 says, "*These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full.*" These are only two of many passages in which Jesus addressed the issue of joy in his followers. This emphasizes the fact that He wants us to realize that joy comes only from Him; it is not a natural human trait because the things of this world produce feelings and attitudes that rob us of our joy, or at the very least, leave us wanting something more. If, however, our joy comes from Him, it may be full (complete). It doesn't get better than that. To have a joy that is full, that nothing can take away, is to live in a different realm from most people in the world.

Peace - John 14:27 records these words of Jesus: "*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be*

*afraid.*" One of the greatest attributes of the Christian is peace. I believe it's the one characteristic that sets Christians apart from the rest of the world more than any other trait and the one that non-Christians seek more than any other. That's because the things of this world do not offer peace; Jesus is the source of real peace. It's that calm that comes from resting in Him and knowing He's in control regardless of our circumstances.

Longsuffering - In 1 Timothy 1:16 Paul said, "*However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.*" Longsuffering, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, means "patiently enduring lasting offense or hardship." Paul fought against and persecuted Christians for a long time and yet God went to great lengths to reveal Himself to him and accept him in spite of his past. Paul's message in the above passage means that Christ extended him longsuffering as an example to others of Christ's willingness to do the same for them. Years ago when we were members of First Baptist Snellville, Dr. James Merritt preached a sermon in which he showed us that the name Methuselah meant, "When he dies, it will come," with "it" being the flood. He showed through various passages that when Methuselah died, the flood came and the reason Methuselah lived longer than any other man in recorded history was to provide evidence of God's longsuffering toward the people He created. He gave people chance after chance to come around and believe in Him. He still today is longsuffering toward us as He bears with our apathy and even disobedience to a point. However, just like He finally sent the flood, He will eventually judge and punish us. Since we're not God, it is not our responsibility to judge and punish others, so we're to exhibit longsuffering toward others, regardless of how long it lasts.

Kindness - Psalm 117:2 says, "*For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!*" Any of us can be kind toward those who are kind to us. The test of our kindness, though, is whether we're kind to those who aren't kind to us. That's why I believe this passage refers to God's kindness as "merciful kindness." In His great mercy, He is kind to us. In spite of our sinfulness, He is kind to us. One thing that I do to remind myself of God's merciful kindness is to give a generous tip to a waiter or waitress who, in my flesh, I don't believe deserves it. I tell myself, "If God extended His kindness to me based on my actions, I'd be in a heap of trouble!"

Goodness - 1 Chronicles 16:34 says, "*O give thanks to the Lord for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting.*" And Psalm 34:8 says, "*O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!*" And one more, Matthew 7:11 says, "*If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*" We all know that God is good, but do we really understand how good He really is? We have probably all made the statement, "God is good" when something works out like we want it to, but do we realize that God is good all the time? Even when things don't work out like we want them to? Yes, He is good and His goodness isn't tied to our circumstances. He does love us and care about us even more than our earthly fathers do and He loves us so much that sometimes He allows us to go through hardship in order to get us where we need to be for our good and His glory. I love the phrase from the verse above that says, "*How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!*" If you have a relationship with God through Jesus, you know exactly what that means and you have probably

many times taken refuge in Him. There's no greater blessing than to call out to God and know that He is there because of His goodness and know that you can take refuge in Him.

Faithfulness - Lamentations 3:22-23 says, "*Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.*" And 1 John 1:9 says, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" It's difficult to fully grasp that even when we mess up, God is there loving us and is faithful to forgive us when we confess our sins. If you feel everyone else has abandoned you and you have no one to turn to, you can know that God is still with you and is your constant, faithful friend. God's faithfulness to us should motivate us to model that faithfulness back to Him.

Gentleness - Matthew 11:29 records these words of Jesus: "*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*" Repeat the words, "*for I am gentle and lowly in heart,*" and think about God and Jesus being gentle and lowly in heart. There is gentleness in the shepherd's guidance of the sheep; he doesn't yell at them. He gently guides them and speaks softly to them. Remember the words of Psalm 23-- "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*" This would be a good time to read back over that psalm and picture the gentleness of our Lord as He leads us, restores us and protects us.

Self-control - The greatest example of self-control of all time was exhibited by Jesus when He hung on the cross, hearing the scorn and mocking of the people, and instead of condemning them, said, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.*" This was God incarnate, who could have condemned them and ascended from the cross into heaven right before their eyes, but He chose to endure it for our sakes. And, yet, we don't even have enough self-control to control our emotions when someone cuts in front of us in a line or does some other minor offense toward us. I recently read this teaching in the book, *Mothers-in-Law vs. Daughters-in-Law*, by Elisabeth Graham: To take offense, whether justified or unjustified, is to cast aside the power of God in your life. (My re-wording) Most if not all the time we lose self-control is when we become offended by another person's actions. However, if we apply this truth to each of those situations, how we would experience the power of God living in us! I urge you to try this out and see what a difference it makes in your life. I've been practicing it and it's been so rewarding because it's exciting to know that the God of the universe is working inside me. What I've done is to quote this phrase every time I am tempted to be offended and ask God to help me to not cast the power of His Holy Spirit aside, but to empower me to overcome the temptation to be offended.

Second Peter 1:2-4 says, "*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*" We've looked at quite a few characteristics of God, so we know a little about His character. If we're going to emulate Him, these are characteristics that we must exhibit, not in our own power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit living in us. In the Galatians 5 passage that listed the fruit of the spirit, the phrase that followed the list was, "*And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions*

*and desires.*" The key words are "*have crucified the flesh.*" This is a choice we make with our mind, a choice to follow God's example and not what our flesh wants, a choice to cast aside what we recognize as our fleshly desires in order to be a recipient of "*His exceedingly great and precious promises*" and his "*divine nature.*"

Examine: Continue asking God to reveal any sinfulness in your heart and cleanse you of it. Then ask Him to give you His character traits through the power of His Holy Spirit living in you. These are not traits that you can just pick one or two and work on and then move to others; they are all traits of God's character that we should, as His child, emulate. They do not come naturally in our flesh; they all come from the Holy Spirit living within us. Based on our different personalities, some traits will be more difficult for us than others, though. Look back over the list and consider how you measure up to each trait. Then ask God to give you His supernatural ability to manifest them as you go about your day.

Prayer: God, I know that I don't naturally possess these character traits, but I know that, as Your child, if I'm going to manifest Your character and glorify You with my life, I must exhibit these traits. I can only do that by the power of Your Holy Spirit living and working within me. Please allow me to set aside my weaknesses and allow Your Holy Spirit to empower me to exhibit Your traits. I determine right now to surrender to You throughout today and yield my fleshly thoughts and actions to be transformed into Your thoughts and Your actions. May others see You working in me so that You will be glorified through me today and lead me in acknowledging that it is You working in me.

Meditation for today: "*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,*" 2 Peter 1:3.

#### **DAY 4**

My focus for today is Isaiah 66:2b: "*I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and who trembles at My word.*" Humility, submissiveness and a fear of God can replace those unrighteous attitudes of my heart. If I have these three things, there will be no selfishness, no anger, no pride, no materialism, and no vanity. So if I'm going to live in a way that pleases God, I must wrap my heart and mind around these qualities and ask God to help me live them out.

Although none of these traits--humility, submissiveness and a fear of God--are accomplished through our own human strength, probably the one that most of us struggle the most with understanding is the fear of God. We're told throughout scripture that we're to fear God. Psalm 111:10a says, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" and Acts 9:31 says, "*Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.*" Many people describe this fear as reverence and respect. However, the word used is "fear." Is it likely that our Christian society has become so casual in our application of the Word to our lives that we have difficulty grasping the fact that we're really supposed to fear God?

One similarity I think of when I think of fearing God is the fear that I had for my parents when I was growing up. Now, I realize that this is only a "smidgeon" of the fear I should have for God, but it's at least in the same realm. I loved my parents so much and I didn't want to disappoint them because of my love for them. But I also didn't want to disobey them because I knew there were consequences to my disobedience. This fear was definitely more than a healthy reverence and respect—it was fear. That is the kind of fear I need concerning God and His Word—a love for Him so deep that it compels me to obey Him and a realization that He looks at sin very seriously and punishes His children when we disobey. There are many examples of God's judgment on disobedience in scripture. Take a moment to read Leviticus 26 to see God's words to Moses for the children of Israel concerning His promise of blessing on their obedience and His retribution on their disobedience.

Hebrews 12:6 says, "*For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.*" God chastens us to teach us that there are consequences for living outside His boundaries and to mold us to be the people He wants us to be just like the sculptor chipping away his product to create just the sculpture he desires and the landscaper pruning the vines so they can produce more bountifully.

Could the root cause of our failure to fear God and our lack of humility and submissiveness be that I don't love Him enough to want to follow His commands and adopt His character? If so, then what must I change so I can turn this around? This same problem is also the cause of all my unrighteousness. So how can I develop a whole-hearted, all-encompassing love for God? This is not something I can do on my own. I can give him my "widow's mite" of the love that I, as a human, am capable of and He can transform it into a godly kind, God-sized love through the power of His Holy Spirit. I need to pray daily for God to give me a greater love for Him, a love that compels me to serve and obey Him.

If I love God in such a way that I have an overwhelming desire to serve Him, I will also love others and want to serve them. Second Corinthians 5:11a says, "*Knowing, then, the fear of the Lord, we persuade people.*" What this means is that if we truly fear and love the Lord, we will persuade people to accept Jesus because we know their consequence of rejecting Him. How could we possibly stand by and let people we love suffer eternal consequences of rejecting God without earnestly trying to persuade them? This is the epitome of a lack of love for both God and others.

Examine your heart and consider if you really fear God. How would you describe your level of fear of God? Ask God to help you today to see how this concept should be applied to your life.

Prayer: Lord, please give me Your humble spirit, make me submissive to Your will, and give me a healthy fear of You that keeps me in the center of Your will and help me to do all these things out of a sincere love for You and an intense desire to please You. I realize that I cannot love you as I want to on my own, but fill me to overflowing with Your love, an overflowing that reaches those around me. In the precious name of Jesus, I ask you these things. Amen.

Meditation for today: "*I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and who trembles at My word.*" Isaiah 66:2b.

## DAY 5

Our focus verse for this week is *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew that steadfast spirit within me."* (Psalm 51:10) We focused first on asking God to remove the dirt and dust from our heart and now we will focus on asking Him to remove the clutter from our heart. In our homes, there are things that are in the wrong places and other things that just shouldn't be there at all. These are similar to the things I have in my heart that either have the wrong priority, they need to be moved, or they are just unnecessary or inappropriate. This reminds me of Hebrews 12:1-2 (my life passage), *"Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured the cross and despised the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of God's throne."* The clutter in my heart is the same as the "weight" described here. It includes the things that weigh me down as I run the race God has set before me. As I think about laying "aside every weight," I picture myself running a race with a backpack full of things I refuse to lay down and imagine how much more tiring the race would be than it would if I would be willing to lay down the backpack of things (weights) and run freely the race God wants me to run. For the next few days, I will ask God to show me what those things are.

As I pray through this question of what is cluttering my heart and my life, three categories have come to mind. One is the clutter of things around me which have a hold on my heart; second is clutter of activities that I enjoy but take time away from the activities that are God's best for me; and third is clutter of values that I hold that may be taking the place of the values that come from God.

Concerning clutter of things, I have realized something that is very hard for me to say, and it is that I have too many clothes and too many "knick-knacks" setting around our home. I was at a friend's house not long ago and she wanted to show me a jacket in her closet. When she opened the door to her closet, I was aghast at how few clothes were in there. I thought, "Goodness, she must not have any trouble picking out something to wear!" As I've thought about that since then, I'm reminded that, as a general rule, we only wear about 20% of what's hanging in our closet; the rest we just hope we'll get back into or we're afraid we'll need again if we gain the weight back, or maybe they'll come back in style, or just maybe we'll one day have something to wear them with. How freeing it would be to clear our closets of the clothes we don't wear so that we can go in and easily pull out something without the distraction of the things we won't wear. Those extra clothes would mean a lot to someone who doesn't have enough clothes, and there really are those people, even in our area. The main issue here is that the distraction that loving things such as clothes takes a place in my heart that belongs to God. When I'm consumed with having more clothes or household trinkets, I'm not consumed with God and studying His Word and seeking His direction for my daily life. Also, if I'm consumed with having more clothes and things, I'm spending money that I could be giving to someone who has a greater need for basics, such as food and shelter.

Years ago I was studying John 15:2 that says, *"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."* As I

prayed through that truth for several days, asking God to prune me so that I may bear more fruit, one thing that He did was to take away my desire to shop—the kind of shopping where I don't need anything; I just go shopping to browse and see what's out there. When the desire was gone, I realized that so many times I had gone shopping without feeling a need for a certain item or items, but came home with them because when I saw them, I felt a need or more a want that compelled me to buy them. Not only was this cluttering my life with unnecessary things, but it was also taking time away from activities that would have been more productive or meaningful.

Concerning clutter of activities, one of the most valuable things I've ever done was to make a list of everything I did, from day-to-day household chores to activities I was involved in and everything in between. It was a long list, as anyone's would be, and I prayed over every item on the list, asking God if each one was His will for me to do. This was when Brett and Christie were in high school and I was homeschooling them. There were items on the list that God showed me how to streamline so they didn't take up so much time and there were items that God showed me I needed to delegate to Brett and Christie. The activities that I delegated to Brett and Christie were things that they enjoyed and learned to do that they would have missed out on if I had continued doing them.

I believe we have a tendency to fill our lives so full of activities that we don't have the time to serve God in the ways He calls us. I'm reminded of seeing a squirrel in the middle of the road, seeing him run this way, then turn and run the other way, obviously not knowing exactly what he wants or needs to do. This is much like we are when we have hearts that are cluttered with sin and activities that cause us to look this way, then look that way, not focusing on what we really should do. A key word comes from this thought and it is "focus" on God and His will. A life lived with this focus will be an abundant life.

I cannot leave this topic of activity clutter without mentioning the time we spend on our phones or iPads looking at social media or playing games. Do we spend time doing this when we could be talking with the person we're with? Do we spend time doing these things when we could be meditating on the Word we studied earlier that day? There are many activities that would be more productive than spending an over-abundance of time in these activities. I'm not saying we should not spend any time doing these things, but they should not hold us captive and keep us from doing the activities that can be more productive in God's work.

Examine: Ask God to search your heart for the clutter of things and activities and reveal to you any unnecessary things and activities that are taking the place of the best that He has to offer. Also ask Him for an open mind and willing heart to relinquish what He reveals to you as unnecessary.

Prayer: Lord, You know my heart better than I know it, so please search me and reveal to me the things and activities that have a hold on my heart that are either sinful or simply not Your best for me. I really don't want to miss out on Your best for my life and settle for less than that. Please help me to love You more and to be compelled from that love to value the things and activities that You value. In Jesus' precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation: *“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”* John 15:2

## **DAY 6**

Today we will look at the clutter of values in our heart. On the next page is a partial list of values from the link, <http://www.stevpavlina.com/articles/list-of-values.htm>. Look over the list and check the values that are yours, then prioritize the ones you checked.

Abundance  
Acceptance  
Accomplishment  
Activeness  
Adventure  
Affection  
Ambition  
Appreciation  
Approval  
Attractiveness  
Belonging  
Boldness  
Bravery  
Calmness  
Care  
Carefulness  
Charm  
Cheerfulness  
Cleanliness  
Comfort  
Compassion  
Confidence  
Conformity  
Contentment  
Conviction  
Creativity  
Correctness  
Daring  
Dependability  
Determination  
Devotion  
Diligence  
Dignity  
Drive  
Education  
Efficiency  
Elegance  
Encouragement  
Endurance  
Energy  
Enjoyment  
Enthusiasm  
Excellence  
Fairness  
Faith  
Fame  
Family  
Fashion  
Fitness  
Flexibility  
Freedom  
Friendship  
Frugality

Fun  
Generosity  
Giving  
Grace  
Gratitude  
Happiness  
Harmony  
Health  
Helpfulness  
Heroism  
Holiness  
Honesty  
Honor  
Hospitality  
Humility  
Humor  
Hygiene  
Imagination  
Impact  
Independence  
Influence  
Inspiration  
Intelligence  
Intimacy  
Intuition  
Investing  
Joy  
Justice  
Knowledge  
Leadership  
Listening  
Loyalty  
Making a difference  
Marriage  
Maturity  
Meticulousness  
Modesty  
Motivation  
Neatness  
Nonconformity  
Obedience  
Open-mindedness  
Optimism  
Organization  
Patience  
Peace  
Perfection  
Perseverance  
Piety  
Pleasure  
Popularity  
Power  
Practicality

Preparedness  
Pride  
Privacy  
Professionalism  
Prosperity  
Punctuality  
Purity  
Recognition  
Relaxation  
Reputation  
Resourcefulness  
Respect  
Rest  
Reverence  
Sacrifice  
Satisfaction  
Security  
Self-control  
Selflessness  
Self-respect  
Sensuality  
Service  
Sharing  
Shrewdness  
Significance  
Silence  
Simplicity  
Speed  
Spirituality  
Spunk  
Status  
Strength  
Structure  
Success  
Talking  
Teaching  
Thankfulness  
Thoroughness  
Thoughtfulness  
Trust  
Truth  
Understanding  
Uniqueness  
Unity  
Victory  
Virtue  
Vitality  
Volunteering  
Warmth  
Wealth  
Wisdom  
Wittiness  
Zeal

This is certainly not an exhaustive list, and it's not a list of values everyone should have, but it is at least a list of values that can show you how values you hold dear can shape who you are. It can also show you how two differing values can cause conflict within yourself and with another person. For example, the values for talking and listening cannot exist simultaneously. You either value what you want to say or you value hearing what the other person thinks. You may actually have both of these values, but in specific situations, one will override the other. Another example is that you may have a value of pride, which can be a good thing, but can also be a very bad thing, such as when you find yourself in a disagreement with another person and your pride keeps you from admitting your mistake.

As you looked through this list, there were probably some values that you checked because you think you have them because you know you should have them, but you really don't have them. Look back over the list and really examine your heart and determine what some of those values are. Set aside some time during the day to consider what values are important to you, not from the list, but from thinking about yourself, and list them in order of priority. Ask God to show you values you don't need to have and values that you need to have that aren't on your list.

One of the most valuable exercises in this realm that I've ever done was in a real estate workshop years ago where the instructor gave us a similar list of values and instructed us to check all the values that we held. After we did that, he used the illustration of being on an airplane and being told that the plane was overloaded and every passenger had to throw out five articles or the plane would crash, so we had to mark off five values. He repeated that exercise several times, saying there was still too much weight on the plane until, finally, we each got to the point of saying, "I'll go down with these values; I'd rather die than give these up." At that point, we were able to see the values that drive us, that give purpose to our lives. It was that exercise that birthed my mission statement. I took the values I would rather die than give up and wrote the mission statement that drives almost everything I do, one that I pray almost every morning. I would encourage you to go to the link given that contains a more extensive list of values and do the same exercise. It could be life-changing. And, by the way, this is not an endorsement of this website; it simply contains a good list of values that serves the purpose of this exercise.

Almost every morning as I get ready for the day, I listen to a sermon on podcast by various preachers. The sermon I listened to the day before writing this was by David Platt and was incredibly fitting for this topic. I encourage you to listen to it. If you have a smart phone or iPad, go to the podcast app and search for The Church at Brook Hills, and download it. Then look for the sermon titled "The Gospel and the Rich." David preaches passionately about how we as Americans spend our money on things that we don't need with such disregard for hurting and starving people around the world, some even in our back door. I can't encourage you strongly enough to listen to this; it also can be life-changing.

Examine: From the prioritizing of values, did you see conflicting values? Did you feel convicted that some values you have are not God's best for you? Did the majority of your values involve your relationship with others or were they self-serving? Ask God to reveal any clutter of values to you and surrender these to Him, allowing Him to help you remove the values that do not come from Him so you can run the race He has planned for you without the unnecessary weight of inappropriate activities and values.

Prayer for today: Lord God, I confess to You that I have allowed values that aren't Your best for me to clutter up my heart and my life. I ask that you reveal to me throughout today even more clutter in my heart and life that I haven't recognized yet as clutter. And I ask that You give me the courage and strength to surrender all of these to You so that I will be able to serve you in freedom from this unnecessary weight. I really do want to run with endurance the race that You have set before me. In the precious name of Jesus I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: *"...let us lay aside every weight...and run with endurance the race that is set before us."* Hebrews 12:1

## **DAY 7**

*"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?"* Psalm 42:1-2

This is my prayer through this fast--that I will so hunger and thirst for God and His righteousness that it will replace all the sin and clutter in my life. The best way to get rid of these things is to replace them, not with other clutter, but with God's character and His values instead. A hunger and thirst for God is the ultimate replacement.

John 5:43-44 records these words of Jesus: *"I have come in My Father's name, yet you don't accept Me. If someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe? While accepting glory from one another, you don't seek the glory that comes from the only God."* Are we focused on receiving recognition and glory from our peers instead of pleasing God who created us and has the plan for our lives? In verse 30, Jesus said, *"I can do nothing on My own. I judge only as I hear, and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."* Even Jesus did not do what He might have wanted to do; He did the will of His Father, who is also my Father. So how in the world should I think that I should do what I want to do, unless I have allowed God to so control me that His desires have become my desires. Jesus was saying simply, "I just do what My Father tells me to do." How different would our lives be if we went through each day with that same principle: just to do whatever God tells us to do. If my heart truly longs for God and His righteousness just as the deer pants for the water brooks, that's exactly what our life would look like.

Reflect on what you've learned this week. What sins were you convicted of? What has been your response? What unnecessary weights did you see and what has been your response? Review the three categories of clutter that can be in our lives as described in the past two days' devotionals. Continue to consider what clutter is in your heart and life that you need to clear away in order to be free to hear and do whatever God tells you to do.

How very rewarding it is for the God of the universe to speak to us through His Word! As I've experienced these first few days of this fast, He has spoken to me, directed my heart, revealed my heart to me, revealed Himself to me through profound truths. This is probably the most rewarding thing I've ever done, both spiritually and every other way. I'm convinced that fasting is the key to breakthroughs in the life of a Christian. Too many of us take the easy way out and

expect great things from God. How pitiful that must look to Him. If we want to do our part to show serious devotion to Him and an eager, overwhelming desire to know Him and know His will, fasting is the key. He has shown countless examples in His Word of how He blesses His children when they fast and pray and seek Him. I'm committed from this point on to devote myself to fasting and prayer as often as I sense He calls me to it.

Here's a summary of what we've learned this week:

1. My heart must be constantly cleansed of any sin and clutter that enters it.
2. After confession and repentance of the sin and clutter I've allowed in my heart, I must allow God to replace them with His thoughts, desires, and character.
3. The best replacements for my sin and clutter are humility, a submissive spirit to God's will, and a fear of God--a fear that comes from loving Him and knowing how seriously He looks at disobedience. He so wants His best for me that He will punish me for my disobedience.
4. The bottom line of having a clean heart is to have an all-out, deep, consuming love for God. If I truly love Him, I will be selfless, gentle, loving, kind, compassionate, longsuffering, patient, and everything else that He is. I'm convinced that everything in my relationship with God and with others is grounded in this one thing--how much I really love God.

Psalm 119:30 says, "*I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I have set my heart on your laws.*" As we said earlier this week, setting our hearts on God's laws is an intentional act. If we choose obedience before we're tempted to sin, then we're much more likely to abstain from sinful behaviors and thoughts.

Examine: You may not be fasting as you go through this study, but if you are, how are you doing so far? Are you approaching this time with a heart of seeking God and knowing Him better, seeking His will for your life? Whether you're fasting or not, determine what changes you need to make in your life in order to be able to consistently seek God's will for your life. What has God done for you this week concerning cleansing your heart of unrighteousness? What sins and clutter did He reveal to you? What have you done with what He has shown you? What do you still need to do with what He has shown you?

Prayer for today: God, please help me to continually guard my heart and be aware of when I have sinned against you, and lead me in confession and repentance so that I can have a clean heart. Please help me, too, to love you with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. And may my love for You overflow to those around me. Help me to have a heart for listening to You and doing whatever You tell me to do. Help me to constantly surrender my desires and follow Your desires for me. I realize that only by giving myself to You can I experience the abundant life that You offer. Please don't let me miss that by holding onto what I want. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: "*I do not seek my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*" (John 5:30b)

## WEEK TWO - DIRECT OUR STEPS

### DAY 8

The second phase of my fast and prayer focus is asking God to direct our steps for where He wants to take us this year. And I remind myself that just because I'm moving on from the "clean my heart" phase, it doesn't mean that I'm moving on from that process and it's done. That is a daily, really moment-by-moment, process. I'm to constantly keep my heart in check and insure that it's clean.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and he will direct your path.*" This tells me that the foundation of allowing God to direct our steps is trusting Him. We would never want a guide whom we couldn't trust to take us where we needed to go. In the same way, we must trust God before we'll be willing to let Him direct our steps. But how do we trust Him? First, let's consider how we know God to be trustworthy.

1. He created the earth and all that is in it.
2. He directed the Israelites throughout history and provided for their needs. When they got into trouble and off the path was when they failed to trust Him.
3. He loved us so much that He gave His one and only Son to die for us so that we can be reconciled to Him and we can have a relationship with Him. If we can't trust someone who made that great a sacrifice for us, we can't trust anyone and the problem is with us, not Him.
4. There's proof that He rose from death and ascended into heaven. Jesus still lives today and He reigns over all the earth (1 Cor. 15:25-28). Also, looking at Hebrews 12:1-2 again, we see that we're to keep my eyes on Jesus, who is the source and perfecter of our faith, as we run the race laid out for us. Jesus, who endured the cross, despising the shame cast on Him, is sitting at the right hand of God's throne directing each one of us in the race set before us. How in the world would we not trust Jesus who died for us and God who created us?
5. Jesus and God have proven themselves trustworthy throughout my lifetime. I cannot even think of making a complete list of all the ways God has directed my steps and answered prayers throughout my life. He has proven Himself to be trustworthy. Think about all the ways He has guided you and answered your prayers.

Exodus 33:13-14 records an exchange between Moses and God as Moses sought for assurance that God would lead him and the children of Israel: "*Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people.*" And He said, '*My Presence will go with you, and I will give your rest.*'" God is the same for us today. He says to each one of us, "My presence will go with you and I will give you rest." If we live in obedience to Him and

seek Him, we can rest assured that He will guide us just as He guided Moses and the children of Israel.

Our focus for today will be examining our trust in God and setting our hearts to trust Him with our future. Psalm 23:1 says, "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*" The shepherd leads his sheep where he wants them to go. All they have to do is follow. Their job is easy. So we must trust God as our shepherd and know that he is leading us to go where He wants us to go. Then we must be willing to follow. We must have the faith of a sheep, who humbly acknowledges the leadership of the shepherd.

Examine: How do you know that God is trustworthy? How has God shown Himself to be trustworthy to you personally? Can you see yourself as a sheep who humbly acknowledges the leadership of the shepherd? How do you see that concept playing out in your life?

Prayer for today: Lord, help me to trust You in every aspect of my life today. Help me to keep You in the forefront of my mind as I go through my day and be conscious of my need for You. Constantly remind me that You are trustworthy. Don't allow me to attempt anything in my own strength. I want desperately to serve You effectively and the only way I can do that is to serve You with the ability You give me, so empower me to serve You in a way that brings honor and glory to You. In Jesus' precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart.*" Proverbs 3:5a

## **DAY 9**

In Proverbs 3:5-6, the second step toward God directing my steps is "*lean not on your own understanding,*" or, as another translation states, "*do not rely on your own understanding.*"

In Luke 5:1-10, we see a story of Peter and the other disciples with Jesus. Peter and his friends had been fishing all night and had caught nothing. Then Jesus, in the middle of the day when it was known to not be the best time to fish, told Peter to cast his net into deep water. Peter told Jesus that they'd been fishing all night and had caught nothing, but then he said, "*But at Your word, I'll let down the nets.*" Peter didn't understand, it made no sense to him, but he obeyed. The result is recorded in verse 6: "*And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking.*" If we approach this life using our own reasoning, we will miss out on so much that God wants to do through us. In order to live the effective, supernatural life that God has planned for us, we must be willing to set aside our human reasoning and step out in faith toward what God is leading us to do, trusting Him when it doesn't make sense to us.

Another passage that gives us a great example of this is found in Judges 7, in the story of Gideon and his army facing the Midianites, who had an army of 120,000. At first, Gideon had an army of 32,000, but God reduced it to an army of 300. God told Gideon He was doing this so the Israelites wouldn't boast that they had done it; it would be obvious to all that God had delivered them. God still does that today in our lives. When we know He is leading us to do something

that we know we can only do it in His power, then we know that it truly was Him when we've accomplished what He wanted us to do. I heard it said years ago that if there's nothing in your life that you can't explain in logical, normal terms, then God isn't working in your life. This absence, I believe, indicates a lack of trust on our part. If we really trust God, we will not try to understand the why or the how; we'll simply follow in humble obedience.

Tommy and I saw this play out before our eyes as Brett and Kristin decided to leave the security of a traditional church and move to Canada, along with their three girls, to plant a church there, and Christie decided to move alone to Roatan for a year to teach children with special needs, leaving a great and secure job with the Forsyth County School System. They all made these moves depending on the support of churches and individuals who felt led to support them. To some people, neither of these moves looked sensible; however, if they relied on their own understanding and refused to go, they would have been disobedient to God. When God leads us in a certain direction, we must follow Him even if it doesn't make sense to us. There were obstacles in both of these situations that they and we knew would only be overcome through the power of God. It was incredible to watch God move in ways that were so far beyond our expectations. It was one of the most exciting and rewarding times of our family's life and has continued as we've seen God continually move in both places.

Examine: List some things that God has done in your life that you knew without a doubt were God and not you. Ask God to stretch you and work in your life in ways that cause you to do things that you know you cannot do on your own.

Prayer: Lord God, I confess that I want to do things that I understand and know that I can do. However, I know that if I'm going to live in the power of Your Holy Spirit, I must be willing to stretch myself and be willing to proceed in things that I know I cannot do on my own, things that I can do only through surrendering to Your power. Please give me the courage and strength to do this. Give me opportunities to see You at work in me and use me wherever you see fit and using the gifts you have given me. In Jesus' precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: "*and lean not on your own understanding,*" Proverbs 3:5b.

## **DAY 10**

The third step given in Proverbs 3:5-6 is "*in all your ways acknowledge Him.*" The word "acknowledge" in Hebrew is "yada," which means "to know or make known." This says to me that I'm to know Him so I can make Him known, and these two things become the thread that runs through everything I do. I've always thought that "acknowledge" just meant that I'm to consider His desires in everything I do, and that is one part of it. However, it also means that I'm to make Him known and tell of His love and his deeds in "all my ways"--not in one separate compartment such as to a Bible study group, but also in my work, in my interaction with a clerk at a store, in my conversations with friends, in my posts on social media--everything I do.

First, let's consider what it means to know, really know, God. We get to know Him by the study of His Word and through prayer. However, many times we do this too casually to really comprehend who He is and the full nature of who He is, at least all that our minds can

comprehend. It would be tremendously beneficial to us to regularly study His character and His power and try to absorb as much of that as we possibly can. However, the kind of “knowing God” that is meant here carries the knowledge of God to a deeper level, one which commands our acknowledgement of Him as Lord of our life, the Good Shepherd whom we choose to follow. Then as we are faced with making decisions, we acknowledge His presence and reign as Lord over us and we, through the power He gives us, are able to yield to His plan, His desire. If you don’t grasp anything else in this Bible study, I pray that you will grasp this concept. Please don’t miss it. This is probably the most important and beneficial concept we can apply in our lives if we want to fulfill God’s plan for us. Put in your memory bank this phrase of the passage for today: *“In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path.”*

To illustrate the concept of acknowledging God, remember a time when you were in a crowded parking lot and there was a bumper-to-bumper line of cars going out. You were in a side lot needing to work your way into that line of traffic. You were dependent on someone letting you out; you wouldn’t just push your way in. There are three types of people in that line of traffic. First, there’s the person who will not look your direction, will definitely not make eye contact, because he doesn’t want to acknowledge you’re there because then he might feel guilty for not letting you out. Second, there’s the person who looks at you but continues on because he’s not willing to yield his time and his place in line to let you in. Third, there’s the person who looks intentionally at you and motions for you to come on in, yielding his time and his place in line to you. We’ve all seen these three types of people. Now equate that situation to your own life when you’re faced with a choice to make. Do you ignore God’s presence because you’re determined to do what you want to do and you know you’ll feel guilty if you acknowledge His presence without yielding to Him? Do you acknowledge His presence, but resist His leadership and push on ahead into what you want to do? Or do you acknowledge God’s presence and willingly surrender your desires to His and allow Him to lead you? Sometimes we simply may not have the desire to surrender to Him because our selfishness is stronger than our desire to follow him, but in those situations it’s critical that we recognize our selfishness, confess it to God, and ask Him to give us the desire to do what He wants us to do, to surrender to His will. It’s amazing to sense the power of God in our lives when He changes our heart; we know it was absolutely Him because we didn’t have the desire on our own.

Next, let’s consider what it means to make God known to others. If we really know God, we cannot resist opportunities to share Him with others and if we really understand His plan for us, we will know that it includes making Him known to others. We’ve probably all heard the concept of “lifestyle evangelism.” Some people interpret that as meaning that you don’t have to verbally share Christ, you just live according to His principles and others will see Him in you.

This reminds me of a story I heard years ago from Larry Kennedy, our pastor at First Baptist Church, Laurel, MS. He related the story of two men who worked alongside each other for about ten years. One was a Christian and the other was not. The one who was a Christian was always doing good deeds and exhibited almost spotless character. One day the non-Christian, through an interaction with someone outside the office, came to know about Jesus and accepted Him as his Savior. He was so excited that he couldn’t wait to go back to the office and share Jesus with his friend. When he told his friend that he’d accepted Jesus Christ, his friend said, "Oh, I'm so thankful! I've been praying for you for years!" The man was stunned. He said something like,

"You mean you've been a Christian all these years? I haven't accepted Christ for years because I thought that if you could be such a good person on your own, then I could, too." You see, all those years the Christian had modeled God's character, but he failed to acknowledge that it was God living in him. He failed to make God known in his life, allowing others to think that he was such a good person and he got all the glory. This is, in essence, stealing from God. To take the work of the Holy Spirit enabling us to exhibit godly character and then allow others to think we're doing it on our own, we are stealing glory that belongs to God.

Let's look at some ways to acknowledge God--make Him known to those whose paths we cross. One way is to reference something God has taught us or is doing in our life in conversations with others. We should constantly be learning something from God if we're having daily Bible study and prayer time with Him. When the God of the universe speaks to us through His Word or through our prayer time, it's exciting! We should want to share what we've learned with others. Two parts of my mission statement are (1) inspire others to live in a way that brings a smile to the face of God and (2) encourage others to press on toward the prize God has set before them. Many times I use the sharing of something God has shown me to either inspire or encourage another person. In turn, this sometimes compels the other person to also share something God has shown him or her, which is one of my very favorite conversations to have. I've found that this level of conversation leads to a deeper level of friendship than otherwise possible.

Another way to acknowledge God to others is to respond to a question or statement someone makes by giving God glory for something we've done. A few months after I went into real estate, a friend in the office asked me this question: "Why is it that when you have a contract and it starts to fall apart, you don't flip out and stress out over it? You seem so calm when that happens. How do you do that?" My response was that God is in control of my business and my philosophy was to do my very best and trust God with the rest. If God didn't want a person to buy a particular house or a seller to sell their home, I didn't want it to go through. It was simply a matter of trusting God to work out His will in every situation. I acknowledged that God was also in control of the money I made, as long as I worked hard to do my best, so it took the worry out of every transaction. This seemed like a new concept to her. Notice how first my work habits drew her attention so that she noticed something different and then when asked, I was able to share that it was God living in me that caused me to work that way. If our actions are different from others in a positive way, they will draw the attention of others without our even realizing it and will offer us opportunities to share the difference that God is making in our lives.

Another way to acknowledge God is to say simple phrases like "God bless you" when interacting with another person. When said with a smile, this brings God to the mind of the other person. It would be good if, when we say that, we say a private prayer like, "God, please bless this person and make Yourself known to him or her in a mighty way." This simple act of mentioning God to another person may keep you on your toes to act in a way that shows God in a positive light. We definitely won't be effective with this if we've just been rude to a waiter or a store clerk.

An additional way to acknowledge Christ is to share a tract with someone with whom we don't have the opportunity to talk at length. There are thousands of effective tracts available. However, I have written one because I wanted one that would share Christ as I would if I had the opportunity to sit down and talk with them about Christ. I'm in the process of getting graphics

put on it and plan to get it printed. I would be happy to share this with anyone else who would like to take this and put their name and contact information on it and use it, as well.

There are many other opportunities to acknowledge Christ in our daily lives. One fact that I must emphasize here, though, as a precaution, is that our lives must model Christ-like character in order for our words to be effective. The mindset of intentionally acknowledging Christ to others will do much to keep our behavior in check.

Examine: Think of examples of how you have let others know that God is at work in you. How have you brought Him glory this week? Do you bring Him into your conversations? Is it natural for you to talk about what He is doing in your life? If not, ask God to help you be more vocal about Him and His work in your life so that your good works point others to Him, not to yourself. Also ask God to help you live in a godly way that attracts the attention of others as being from the norm and compels them to ask you questions that provide you with opportunities to share Him.

Prayer: Lord God, fill me with Your Holy Spirit so much that You overflow into everything I do and everything I say. Make Yourself known through me so that others know that the good that I do comes from You, not from me. May You be glorified through me. Use me as Your humble servant and help me live in a way that makes others ask me questions that will provide me opportunities to share You with them. I pray that others I come in contact with will come to know You through seeing You in my life. In Jesus' precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: "*In all your ways, acknowledge Him,*" Proverbs 3:6a.

## **DAY 11**

So far this week, we've seen that the foundation for God directing our steps includes the following:

- Trusting Him completely
- Not relying on our own understanding
- Knowing Him and making Him known in everything we do

Proverbs 3:6b says next, "*And He shall direct your paths.*" The preceding commands give what we're to do and then we're shown what God will do as a result. We must do our part and then we can trust God completely to do His part. We cannot go about doing our own thing, failing to trust Him, failing to spend time with Him, and failing to acknowledge Him before others, and then ask Him to direct our steps. The foundation is missing when we do that. This shows how critical a role obedience plays in God's protection and direction.

John 10:1-4 gives Jesus' description of a good shepherd. Verses 3 and 4 say, "*The doorkeeper opens it for him (the shepherd), and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they recognize his voice.*" I can know beyond all doubt that as long as I'm

trusting God and making Him known to others, He will direct me and I will hear Him if I am in fellowship with Him so I can hear His voice.

When I picture the sheep following the shepherd, I can see them humbly looking up at him and listening to him. This tells me that I need to constantly be looking at Jesus and listening to Him. When I pray, I need to make time for listening to Him and not just do the talking and then go about my business. I need to take time at the end of my prayer time to sit and listen to what He wants to say to me. And I need to be open to hear what He wants to tell me and not set limitations on what I'm willing to obey. If I listen with an open heart, He is more likely to speak His words of wisdom to me. We all know what it's like to talk to someone who we know is not going to do what we are trying to persuade them to do. We finally realize we're wasting our time, so we just quit talking and think something like, "It's no use; they've already decided what they're going to do." God's character is not the same as ours, He is much more longsuffering than we are, but even He, as we see in Scripture, finally gives us over to our desires when He knows we're not open to what He is telling us. (See Romans 1:24-25 for an example.) As I'm going about my day, the default of my mind should be to think of Him and His ways, His perspective on every situation I'm in and then follow through with what He wants me to say and do. It's not enough to know the right thing to do; we must do it.

An obvious question when considering following God as He directs our steps is "How do we know which path He wants us to take when we have more than one option that could be His will?" Sometimes it is more difficult than at other times to know clearly the will of God. A few actions we can take in these circumstances are discussed below.

1. Pray diligently for God to make His will very clear to us through the leadership of His Holy Spirit. We must seek His counsel before seeking counsel from another person.
2. Study God's Word and make sure that any options we have line up with it. God will not allow us into something that's contrary to His Word.
3. Seek the counsel of a godly person, one who we know has a close relationship with God and will also seek God's direction in helping us.
4. Evaluate each option and pray that God will give us a peace that only He can give for the option that is His will. Many times this will provide the answer very clearly.
5. Look at our circumstances and evaluate them in light of God's plan for our life. Many times we consider something as a coincidence that's really God leading us.
6. Trust God to lead us in the right direction and not allow us to make a mistake. When we are earnestly seeking His will, He really will direct our steps. Charles Stanley has said, "It would be out of character for God to hide His will and still expect us to walk in it."

Dr. Stanley has listed some hindrances to knowing the will of God in a sermon outline on the website, [www.intouch.org](http://www.intouch.org), and they are listed below.

1. **Self-will:** If you have already made up your mind, it will be difficult to hear what the Lord wants you to do.
2. **The influence of others:** They may comment that God wouldn't expect you to make such a large sacrifice—and thereby discourage you from obeying.

3. **Ignorance of God's Word:** The next generation knows almost nothing about the Bible. Children need to sit in the worship service with their parents—even if they don't understand everything.
4. **Doubt:** Matthew 7:7 says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find." Don't second-guess God's promises will (James 1:6-8).
5. **Unworthiness:** Don't believe the lie that you are undeserving of the Lord's guidance or grace.
6. **Busyness:** If your life is too full to pray, you need to re-evaluate your priorities.
7. **Fear:** When revealed, God's will can seem impossible or foolish. But remember, the Lord can bring good out of every situation (Rom. 8:28).
8. **Known sin:** If you are determined to live a rebellious life, the Father will not fully reveal His will to you.

The information considered today seems to apply only to major decisions we make; however, we make many small decisions every day that impact our lives in much larger ways than we realize. Therefore, it's important that as we conclude our Bible study and prayer time each day, we ask God to direct our steps for that day and try to insure that our plans line up with His plans. He may re-do our plan for the day, so we should be open to His guidance and willing to allow Him that freedom.

Examine: Think back over ways you have sought God's direction in various decisions and remember how He showed you what He wanted you to do. Have there been times that you failed to ask Him what He wanted you to do? Have there been times that you asked Him, but you weren't open to what He told you to do? Do you seek God's direction in your day-to-day activities? Know that God cares about all the details of our life. What kind of adjustment do you need to make in order to seek Him continually and obey His commands? Ask Him to help you do that.

Prayer for today: Lord, make me like a sheep, intently and humbly following You. Don't let me veer off the path, but make me willing to keep my eyes on You and give me ears to hear Your voice, then give me a heart's desire to follow wherever you lead me.

Meditation for today: *"The sheep follow him because they recognize his voice."* John 10:4b

## DAY 12

Yesterday we looked at the first part of John 10. Today we will look at verses 7-15 and see these words of Jesus: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling*

*flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.*" Look back over this passage and read who Jesus says He is. He first says, "*I am the door*" and He repeats it, and then twice He says, "*I am the good shepherd.*" Look back one more time and notice the contrast between the good shepherd and the hireling. Who cared about the sheep? Who led the sheep to an abundant life?

In verse 9, Jesus says, "*I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.*" I equate the sheep pen with my time alone with God; then outside is when I go out to do His business. I don't leave Him, though, because He leads me out. Jesus assures the people that those in His fold go out and find pasture. We can know for sure that if we listen to His voice, He will direct us to the pastures where He wants us to go.

A key to this whole discourse is found in verse 10, when Jesus says, "*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*" He draws a sharp contrast between Himself and others who lead people where they want them to go, not out of love for the people but with self-serving motives. Jesus goes on to say, "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.*" This is contrasted with others who try to lead the sheep differently. Verses 12 and 13 record these words: "*But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care for the sheep.*" In *The McArthur New Testament Commentary*, John McArthur says, "The hired hand (hireling) symbolizes the Jewish religious leaders and, by extension, all false shepherds. They are always mercenaries, doing ministry not for the love of the souls of men or even love for the truth, but for money. Therefore they flee at the first sign of threat to their well-being, because they are not concerned about the sheep. Their overriding priority is self-preservation, and the last thing they care to do is sacrifice themselves for anyone."

Look at the contrast: On one hand, we have Jesus who loves us so much that He gave His life for us and cares about us enough to lead us to His "pastures" or His paths that give us the abundant life that only He can offer. On the other hand, we have false shepherds who want to divert us from the life that Jesus offers. They appeal to our love of things, such as material possessions; our attitudes, such as the desire for fame or recognition; and our desire to follow those who "tickle our ears" with words that we want to hear. However, these false shepherds do not have our best interest at heart; they do not care about us. They care only about themselves. So why in the world would we want to follow anyone but Jesus? Because of our sinful nature. That's why it's so important that we continually seek Him and His leadership if we want the abundant life that He offers.

Examine: Do you relate to the concept that Jesus is your shepherd? How have you allowed Him to lead you? Is there any area of your life that you're allowing a false shepherd to lead you? If so, what has been the result so far? What will you do about it? How can you make sure that you always follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd who loves you?

Prayer for today: Lord God, please give me the ability to see Your leadership in my life and give me the desire to follow You even when I don't understand. Give me also the ability to recognize false shepherds and turn away from them. Please don't allow me to follow any path that's not Yours. And give me the humility of a sheep following You, continually looking to You for direction that I may have the abundant life You promise. Please don't let me miss out on that abundant life. Thank You for being the Good Shepherd who loves and cares for me. In Jesus' precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."* John 10:10b

## **DAY 13**

So far this week, God has directed us on how to lay the foundation for allowing Him to direct our steps. Many times God doesn't show us what He wants us to do a year from now because it may not be His time yet to reveal that to us. What we should focus on is what He wants us to do today. So the key to God's directing my steps must be my abiding in Him, seeking His direction continually. John 15:7 says, *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."* John Piper has said, "The words of Jesus must abide in us if our prayers are to be effective." The way for His words to abide in us is by our daily Bible study. If we want to grow in Him, we absolutely cannot minimize this practice. We have to know the words of Jesus before they can abide in us. John Piper also says, "But this also sheds light on what it means for the words of Jesus to abide in us. Letting the words of Jesus abide in us means letting Jesus abide in us speaking. It means that we welcome Jesus into our lives and make room for Him to live, not as a silent guest with no opinions or commands, but as an authoritative guest whose opinions matter more to us than anyone else's and whose commands are the law of our life." Take time to re-read that last sentence and contemplate it for a while. (John Piper's quotes are from "desiringgod.org" – January 3, 1993.)

In addition to spending time in God's Word, abiding in Him also means praying continually, always being in a spirit of prayer. First Thessalonians 5:17 says, *"Pray without ceasing."* I believe this to mean that our heart should be seeking God every moment and the default of our mind should be a spirit of prayer. This is the "abiding in God" that He intends for us. It can be very easy to compartmentalize our spiritual life by having our Bible study and prayer time and then going about the rest of our day focusing on the activities that we do without much more thought about God and what He wants for us. However, He doesn't want to be just a small part of our life; He wants to *be* our life. Our life should be all about Him and, if it is, we will abide in Him. Remember John Piper's sentence about God being an authoritative guest whose opinions matter more than anyone else's and whose commands are the law of our life. If this is true for us, we will consult Him often throughout the day as we make decisions and as we need His help to exemplify the fruit of His Spirit.

The reason for our abiding in God and His abiding in us isn't just for our good, although there are many personal benefits, such as peace and joy. John 15:5 says, *"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit."* The goal of every Christian

should be to bear fruit, so if I want Jesus to direct my steps in bearing fruit, the condition once again is abiding in Him and allowing Him and His Word to abide in me.

It is always good to have goals and to have in mind things we want to accomplish in the long term. However, if we don't do things in the short term to insure our progress toward those goals, we will get to the future without reaching those goals. Likewise, if I want God to direct my steps six months from now or a year from now, I must abide in Him today and allow Him to abide in me today. Then day-by-day He will lead me down the path to where He wants me to be in the future.

Examine: How much do you value spending time with God every day? It is not enough to go through the motions of Bible study; it's important that we approach God and the study of His Word with passion and a sincere love for Him. Examine your heart and consider whether you approach God with a deep love for Him every day and excitement about what He's going to teach you or with a desire to check this off your list so you can go about your day.

Prayer for today: Lord God, please wake me up each morning early enough to allow time for me to study your Word and seek Your direction for the day. Give me a heart's desire to abide in You continually and to fully understand what You mean when You say, "*He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit.*" Empower me to produce the fruit that it's Your will for me to produce. Lead me every step of today in the direction You want me to go. Show me opportunities to share Your love and kindness to others and give me the courage to take advantage of those opportunities. Help me to acknowledge You in all my ways today. In Jesus' precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: "*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit.*" John 15:5

## **DAY 14**

This is what God has taught me this week concerning allowing Him to direct my steps and my prayer is that you can say the same:

1. I'm to trust Him completely.
2. I'm not to lean on my own understanding.
3. I'm to acknowledge Him (make Him known) in everything I do.
4. If I do these things, He will direct me like a good shepherd leads and protects his sheep.
5. I'm to abide in Him by spending time in the study of His Word and praying continually.

In Second Thessalonians chapter one, Paul said these words to the church at Thessalonica: "*We must always thank God for you, brothers, which is fitting, since your faith is flourishing, and the love of every one of you for another is increasing...It is clear evidence of God's righteous judgment that you will be counted worthy of God's kingdom, for which you also are suffering...And in view of all this, we always pray for you that our God will consider you worthy of His calling and will, by His power, fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified by you and you by Him, according to the grace*

*of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* (1 Thess. 1:3, 5, 11-12) In the verses between verse 5 and verse 11, Paul contrasted the judgment of those who fail to obey God with that of the saints who believed God.

The phrase I want to emphasize from this passage is *“so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you.”* The whole point of allowing God to direct our steps is to glorify Him in everything we do. Sure, a huge side benefit is that our life will be more fulfilling as we live out God’s plan for us. However, the essence of trusting God, obeying Him, abiding in Him, and producing fruit is to bring glory to Him. That should be our goal as we allow God to direct our steps.

First Corinthians 10:31 says, *“Therefore, whatever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God’s glory.”* Looking at the context in which this was taught by the apostle Paul, let’s look at verses 1-5: *“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.”* Paul continued by pointing out some of the sins of the Israelites, such as practicing idolatry, committing sexual immorality, testing God, and grumbling, and how God judged them as they died in the wilderness without reaching the Promised Land. Specifically, in discussion of idolatry and eating food that had been sacrificed to idols, he commanded that they should not eat this food because, as verse 21b says, *“You cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.”*

Because of what Paul said in verse 11, we will look briefly at what God is telling us through this passage. Verse 11 says, *“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.”* The children of Israel, after being released from the Egyptian’s bondage, experienced tremendous outpourings of God’s provision and protection. Consider the parting of the Red Sea, for one example, and the feeding of them by manna from heaven, literally food falling out of the sky, as another. Yet, in spite of all God had done for them, most of them never saw the Promised Land because they departed from the things God had taught them and lived according to their own selfish desires. There is great truth in the above verse that we cannot partake of both God’s table and the table of demons. I’m afraid that many of us want some of what God wants for us, but we’re not willing to leave the table that Satan has put before us to pursue all that God has for us. It would benefit us to remember how the children of Israel who did this suffered and died without seeing the fulfillment of God’s plan because of their disobedience. If we are short-sighted and see only the immediate fulfillment that a pleasure has to offer, we will miss out on the tremendous prize at the end that could have been ours if we had focused on God’s plan.

So we can boil all of this down to a simple choice we have to make—will we serve God or will we serve ourselves? Or, taken to another level, do we want to glorify ourselves or do we want to glorify God? Following a list of commandments may be good in a way, but it will not last if the motivation is not right. The only motivation that pleases God and produces fruit that comes from Him is glorifying Him. The desire to bring glory to His name is what should compel us to

produce fruit such as patience, kindness, and longsuffering. The victory of the children of Israel who were privileged to inhabit the Promised Land is described in Joshua 6:20: “*When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.*” Do you see who provided the victory? The wall of the city of Jericho literally collapsed in front of them! Only God was glorified because only He could have done that. Oh, to live in such a way that God’s power is displayed through our lives! What a worthy goal that is. Psalm 29:2 says, “*Give the Lord the glory due His name; worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness.*”

Examine: Is it the goal of your life to bring glory to God, your creator and sustainer? In what ways do you glorify Him? If you feel you fall short in doing this, confess that to Him right now and ask Him to help you glorify and honor Him in the way that He deserves and in a way that leads others to Him.

Prayer for today: Lord God, please help me to make glorifying You the goal of my life and show me every day and in every situation how I can do that. I ask You to direct my steps in a way that brings honor and glory to You and You alone. I also ask that You would reveal Your power in my life to do things that I cannot do on my own, making You known to those around me. In Jesus’ precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: “*Therefore, whatever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God’s glory.*” 1 Cor. 10:31

## WEEK THREE – GIVE ME PASSION

### DAY 15

This third week of the Daniel fast will be spent focusing on developing and maintaining a passion for Christ and for serving Him. We have a little book called *A Passion for Christ; A Passion for Life* by Brighton Books that contains 31 short devotionals around the topic of developing and maintaining a passion for Christ and for life. Its intention is to help us put Jesus where He belongs: at the center of our life. The author of this book, who is unknown, provides these two quotes in the first day’s devotional:

“Jesus Christ is the first and last, author and finisher, beginning and end, alpha and omega, and by Him all other things hold together. He must be first or nothing. God never comes next!” Vance Havner

“When we wholeheartedly commit ourselves to God, there is nothing mediocre or run-of-the-mill about us. To live for Christ is to be passionate about our Lord and about our lives.” Jim Gallery

I have a friend who is a believer in Jesus after growing up as a Muslim. She told me that what led her to Christ was not people “beating her over the head” with Christianity, but it was the love and spirit of Christ she saw in a few believers. That is what I call passion. It is the driving force behind the love of Christ living in us that compels us to live it out, or rather to live Him out.

The meaning of passion is “strong and barely controllable emotion” (Google) and “a strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something” (Merriam-Webster). Also, m.dictionary.com defines it as “any powerful or compelling emotion or feeling, as love or hate.” So if I have a passion for Christ, I will have a powerful and compelling desire for Him, to spend time with Him and then to do the things that please Him.

Before going further into what a passion for Christ looks like, let’s first look at what lukewarm looks like. Francis Chan, in his book *Crazy Love*, discusses the concept of being lukewarm and how it repulses God. In Revelation 3:15-16 God says this to the church at Laodicea: “*I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*” In his YouVersion devotional for *Crazy Love*, Chan wrote this:

“The Bible says to test ourselves, so I am going to offer you a description of what lukewarm people can look like. As you read these examples, I encourage you to take a searching, honest look at who you are now, and how you are living today.

Lukewarm people...

- Attend church fairly regularly. It is what is expected of them, what they believe ‘good Christians’ do, so they go.
- Give money to charity and to the church...as long as it doesn’t impinge on their standard of living. If they have a little extra and it is easy and safe to give, they do so.
- Desire to fit in both at church and outside of church; they care more about what people think of their actions than what God thinks of their hearts and lives.
- Don’t really want to be saved from their sin; they want only to be saved from the penalty of their sin.
- Are moved by stories about people who do radical things for Christ, yet they do not act. Lukewarm people call ‘radical’ what Jesus expected of all His followers.
- Rarely share their faith with their neighbors, coworkers, or friends. They do not want to be rejected, nor do they want to make people uncomfortable by talking about private issues like religion.
- Gauge their morality or ‘goodness’ by comparing themselves to the secular world. They feel satisfied that they are nowhere as horrible as the guy down the street.
- Say they love Jesus, and He is a part of their lives. But only a part. They give Him a section of their time, money, thoughts, but He isn’t allowed to control their lives.
- Love God, but they do not love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength.
- Love others but do not seek to love others as much as they love themselves.”

Really think about how tragic it would be to have God look at our life and say to us as He said to the Laodiceans, “*I will vomit you out of My mouth.*” That, if nothing else, should motivate us to run the other direction, to seek to love and follow God passionately.

God’s Word gives us what I believe to be the biblical form of passion. Read the following passage from Deuteronomy 6:5-9 and in the first verse, emphasize the word “all”:

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart.*

*Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and as you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”*

Today we will focus on what it means to love God with all our heart (emotions), all our soul (the core of who we are), and all our strength (the actions we do for Him). To have just one of these without the other two would be incomplete love; we cannot have one without the others.

So what does it really mean to love God with *all* our heart, soul and strength? First, the heart is the seat of our emotions. When we use the term, “heart-felt thanks,” we mean a thank you that comes along with a deep emotion, a sincere thanks. So we’re to be in love with God with an emotional, sincere, all-in kind of love—not a surface, spoken-only form of love.

Second, to love God with all our soul, I believe, means to love Him from the very core of our being—the “me” that lives on forever. Psalm 63:1 says, “*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for You, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*” (ESV) David is saying that his soul thirsts for God as if he were in a desert land desiring water. From the very core of my being, I should desire God, desire spending time with Him and meditating on His Word and His ways, just as I would crave water in a desert.

Third, we should love God with all our strength. This may be the physical side of our love for God that compels us to act on our love for Him, to physically show His love in what we say (the strength or courage to talk about Him, take a stand for Him) and what we do (the acts of service toward others that come from an overflow of our love for God).

Loving God with ALL our heart, soul and strength is not something that we can do on our own, no matter how hard we try. This kind of love has to come from God. So if you’ve been thinking so far that you don’t know how to love God at that level, don’t be discouraged. All we have to do is ask God to give us that kind of love for Him. He wants to fill us to overflowing with His love for us and, in turn, enable us to love Him back.

Beth Moore, on one of her videos of her Breaking Free Bible study, tells us of a time when she saw a gorgeous sunset and felt that God had placed that in front of her to show her how much He loved her. Her response was, “I love You, too, Lord.” Think about this concept. God has shown us His love in so many ways that all of us could respond the same way—“I love You, too, Lord.” Even if all you can think of is God’s gift of His Son, Jesus, that alone should be enough to compel you to respond in this way. This response to God reinforces the truth that God loved us first and loving Him back should be a natural response. Remember that John 3:16 begins with “*For God so loved the world...*” And First John 4:19 says, “*We love because he first loved us.*”

If we love God with all our heart, soul, and strength, we will naturally love others out of that love for Him. First John 4:7 and 11-12 says, “*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God...since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*” Do you see that our love for God enables us to love others and, in turn, for them to see God’s love for them? It goes in a full circle from God to us to others and back to God.

My mission statement begins with loving God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. If I fail to truly and completely love God, then nothing else I do matters. Love for God, followed by love for others, must be the driving force of my attitude and my actions. I pray my mission statement almost every morning so that what I believe God has given me as my life purpose is continually in the front of my mind.

Examine: When looking over the list of traits of lukewarm people, what was your assessment of yourself? Would you say that you love God with *all* your heart, soul and strength? Ask God to enable you to love Him at that level, confessing your inability to do that on your own. Ask Him to help you love Him so much that His love overflows to everyone around you and reveals Him to them. Throughout today, consider what changes would occur in your life if you truly loved God with all your heart, soul and strength. Instead of spending time on social media today or doing some other task, consider spending every spare minute asking God to help you love Him at this level and thinking about all the ways He's shown His love for you.

Prayer for today: Lord, I cannot love You the way your Word describes on my own; my flesh is not capable of that kind of desperate, abiding love. Help me to love You with Your kind of love, a God-given and God-breathed love. Only then can I really know You and love You. This is a supernatural love that can be obtained only from You. It is a love that will overflow to others I'm around. Use me to show Your love to them. In Jesus' precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*" Deuteronomy 6:5

## **DAY 16**

Today we will begin breaking down the focus verse from yesterday, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*" So today we will delve further into what it means to love God with all our heart. The Bible tells us that only God knows what is in our heart. Jeremiah 17:9-10 says, "*The heart is more deceitful than anything else and desperately sick—who can understand it? I, the Lord, examine the mind, I test the heart to give to each according to his way, according to what his actions deserve.*" I think that many times we really believe with our mind that we love God, but if we were to examine all our actions and our thoughts, we might doubt that.

In 1 Samuel 16:7, God told Samuel this about one of David's brothers: "*Do not look at his appearance or his stature, because I have rejected him. Man does not see what the Lord sees, for man sees what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart.*" Are our perceptions about ourselves influenced by what others think about us? We can do a lot of good things and act kind and sincere, but really be fooling others who only see what is visible. We must not let ourselves be influenced by the affirmations of others; the only affirmation that really matters is God's—What does He think about me? Are my motives pure? Am I serving God from the overflow of His love in my heart?

Let's compare our heart to a glass full of water. When you bump an open glass and it falls over, what's in it comes out. In the same way, everyday life offers us "bumps" as we deal with other people and difficult circumstances and when that happens, what is in our hearts comes pouring out. What comes out when you get "bumped" in life? If we have a heart that's pure, then pure words, attitudes and actions come out and God is glorified. On the other hand, if we have a heart that's impure, then impure words, attitudes and actions come out for all to see and our witness for Christ is damaged. That's why it's so important to guard our heart and we do that by pouring God's Word into it.

Psalm 19:14 says, "*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to You, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.*" The key word as it relates to today's study is "meditation." What do I meditate on as I go throughout my days? Material things, job, contracts, situations, maybe a little scripture? Jesus said in Matthew 6:20-21: "*But collect for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" The psalmist says in Psalm 119:11 and 15, "*I have treasured Your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you...I will meditate on Your precepts and think about Your ways.*" Meditation on God and His Word doesn't come naturally for us in these human bodies. It is a choice. Notice the psalmist said, "*I will meditate...*"

I have two life passages—the one in Hebrews 12 we discussed earlier and also Psalm 1. It says, "*How happy is the man who does not follow the advice of the wicked or take the path of sinners, or join a group of mockers! Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. He is like a tree planted beside streams of water that bears its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. The wicked are not like this; instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not survive the judgment, and sinners will not be in the community of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.*" What a beautiful picture of a righteous person and what a stark contrast between the righteous and the unrighteous! The key for living a life of righteousness is found in verse 2: "*Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night.*" It's great to have our Bible study every morning; however, if we get up after it and walk away without having soaked in the words and written them on the tablet of our heart, what have we gained? Our Bible study should yield a saturation of God's Word in our hearts so fully that we continue to meditate on it throughout the day and night. Scripture memorization is invaluable to us as we go through life and find ourselves in various situations and difficulties. If scripture is in our hearts, it will come back to us as we need it.

Isaiah 55 gives a beautiful picture of one who delights in God. Here are a few nuggets: "*Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and you will enjoy the choicest of foods. Pay attention and come to Me; listen, so that you will live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the promises assured to David...Seek the Lord while He may be found; call to Him while he is near...For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways, the Lord's declaration. For as heaven is higher than earth, so My thoughts than your thoughts...so My word that comes from My mouth will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish what I please, and will prosper in what I send it to do.*"

All these passages we've looked at today give many benefits of knowing God's Word. We must determine to set our heart on Him and meditate on His Word throughout every day and night if we want to have a heart that loves God completely and that is transformed into His ways rather than our own—*"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways."* But, as mentioned yesterday, we must ask God to give us the ability to love Him with all our heart. It is not something we can do on our own. Loving God with all our heart will give us passion for serving Him and that's what will enable us to glorify Him. Passion is what gives light to our eyes and shows the joy within us.

There's the old hymn, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" that describes the friendship that He wants with us, how He wants to comfort us and protect us. Whether we realize it or not, He is our best friend. We easily give our hearts to other people who may be here today and gone tomorrow, but Christ is the One who has always been there and will always be there for us. Why would we not give our whole heart to Him? Maybe it's because we simply do not realize who He is or we have not gotten to know Him well enough. May we know Him as truly our Best Friend and love Him back in response to His great love for us.

Because the capacity to love God with all our heart must come from Him, it is crucial that we begin each day spending time with Him, in the study of His Word and in prayer, asking Him to give us this supernatural love for Him that fills our heart and drives our actions. This prepares us for that "abiding in Him" kind of walk throughout our day.

In the little book I mentioned earlier, *A Passion for Christ; A Passion for Life*, Billy Graham is quoted as saying, "God proved His love on the cross. When Christ hung and bled and died, it was God saying to the world—I love you." If we fully grasp what He did for us, our natural response will be to love Him back with all our heart, to love Him with a love that affects everything we do, and all our heart's desires.

Examine: Would you honestly say that you love God with all your heart? What are the indicators of your answer? In other words, what do you base your answer on? On a day-to-day basis, what really matters most to you? Now picture Jesus hanging on the cross and you at the foot of the cross, kneeling and head bowed in acknowledgement of the fact that He is doing that for you—that because of His great sacrifice, you are given an abundant, eternal life. What is your response?

Prayer for today: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way."* (Psalm 139:23-24) Lord, thank You for your very gracious and sacrificial gift through Your Son Jesus Christ. Help me to fully comprehend what He did for me and give me a heart full of love for You and for Jesus in response to so great a sacrifice and so great a love. May my primary goal today be to give You glory in all that I do. In Jesus' precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: *"But collect for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* Matthew 6:20-21

## DAY 17

What does it mean to love God with all our soul? First Peter 1:8-9 says, *“You love Him, though you have not seen Him. And though not seeing Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”* The Greek word used for “soul” is “psyche,” which means “life, soul, heart, mind, a person.” It is the makeup, then, of our entire being; it is the “me” that will live eternally; it is the core of who I am. So my soul encompasses my heart and mind, but is more than just those two components.

Doesn't virtually every person have the goal of the salvation of their soul—in one way or another? Hadn't we all rather live eternally than die eternally? Of course, I realize that many people believe there's no such thing as eternity, whether living or dying; they believe that when we die, we just cease to exist. However, the Word of God teaches an eternal life or death. So, knowing that there is an eternal life or death, we have to at least consider that every person has within their soul a desire to live eternally. Many people believe that their goodness, or good works, will allow them eternal life. Many others believe that God is so good that He will allow everyone eternal life. However, many of us believe that our belief and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior is what gives us eternal life; it's all about a relationship with Him.

I've heard about spiritual warfare most of my life, that God has angels literally fighting Satan's angels for our souls, as well as our obedience. Until we accept Christ, Satan's angels fight for our souls, but after we've accepted Christ, they don't just leave us alone—their fight against our joy and our ability to obey and serve God. Jesus dealt with this in a passage in Matthew 4. Verse 1 says, *“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.”* This tells us that this was an intentional event that God's Holy Spirit led Jesus into for the sole purpose of giving us an example of how to overcome Satan's attacks. Satan first confronted Jesus' physical needs. Then he confronted Jesus' obedience to His Father. If God had told Jesus to jump off the temple, he would have done it; after all, He went to the cross where He was rescued by angels. Then Satan confronted Jesus' allegiance to God. These tests attacked literally the very core of who Jesus was in physical body, His soul. Satan still today tempts us in these same areas.

Physically, we're tempted to do what our flesh desires. Then our obedience is tested when we know what we should do, but we know what we want to do. And then our allegiance to God is tested when we have a conflict of values and we allow things or other people to have a higher priority than God.

God's Word warns us of Satan's attempts to destroy us. In Matthew 10:28, Jesus said, *“Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”* Our souls will become weary at times because of living in these fleshly bodies and dealing with temptations. A beautiful passage is found in Psalm 19 that should encourage us: *“The instruction of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise. The precepts of the Lord are right, making the heart glad; the commandment of the Lord is radiant, making the eyes light up. The*

*fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are reliable and altogether righteous.”*

This says to me that when I need God’s instruction, He revives my soul and the results are wisdom, joy and a radiance of His glory. This leads me to 2 Peter 1:3, *“For His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.”* The “us” is our soul, the core of our being, and it possesses all we need for life and godliness through Jesus Christ.

So what does all of this tell us about loving God with all our soul? If our soul is the makeup of our entire being, then every part of us must be given to God, absolutely nothing held back. Psalm 103:1-2 says, *“My soul, praise the Lord, and all that is within me, praise His holy name. My soul, praise the Lord, and do not forget all His benefits”* Then Psalm 104:1 continues, *“My soul, praise the Lord! Lord, my God, You are very great; You are clothed with majesty and splendor.”* Both of these psalms describe God’s goodness. It would be beneficial for us to read these psalms very often to remind ourselves of all that God has done and is doing for us. The main thing to notice in these verses is that the key to loving God with all our soul is to praise Him continually. Praise that is from the core of our being, our soul, transforms our heart and mind and strengthens us to press on because our focus is on Jesus, who gives us the reason for it all.

There’s a great example of this in Acts 16:25-34. Paul and Silas had been thrown into prison for casting a demon out of a slave girl. Verse 25 says, *“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the jail were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s chains came loose.”* Loving God with all our soul means that regardless of the circumstances, we praise Him and when He is glorified, He reveals Himself and He acts in miraculous ways. We can never face anything that He can’t help us overcome. We should remember that Jesus went to the cross so that we could endure the struggles and challenges that we face. This should automatically invoke praise within us. And nothing will give us more passion than praising God at this level!

Examine: How do you praise God? Do you praise Him from the very core of your soul? Do you think often about Him as you go through your day? When you do think about Him, are your thoughts those of praise for who He is? Evaluate how you praise Him with your life. Does your life cause others to praise God? What can you do differently to praise Him more and live in a way that causes others to praise Him?

Prayer for today: Precious Lord, please help me to praise You continually from the core of my being, my soul. Help me to live today in a way that glorifies You so that others see You in me and are led to praise You, as well. Help me to love You with all my soul, with everything that is within me, and I pray that my love for You will keep me so focused and devoted to You that I’m able to see Your will for every step I take today. I pray that You will be the Lord over everything within me to the very core of my being. In Jesus’ precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: *“My soul, praise the Lord, and all that is within me, praise His holy name.”* Psalm 103:1

## **DAY 18**

As I begin my Bible study this morning, I’m thoughtful of the fact that it’s my daddy’s birthday and if he were still here, he would be 86. He was such a scholar of the Word; he loved talking about scripture and I used to love hearing him talk about it with excitement and passion. He had a calm, quiet spirit that radiated God’s love. So it’s my desire to carry on what he taught me that colors my study this morning about what it means to love God with all my mind, which will cause us to live a life of passion for knowing and serving Him.

In Matthew 22:36, Jesus was asked this question by a Pharisee: *“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”* Matthew 22:37 provides Jesus’ response: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and with all your mind.”* The Greek word for “mind” is “dianoia,” which means, “mind, thinking, understanding.” Colossians 3:1-4 says, *“So if you have been raised with the Messiah, seek what is above, where the Messiah is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on what is above, not on what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with the Messiah in God. When the Messiah, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”* The key phrase for today’s study is, *“Set your mind...”* While our hearts may be led astray subconsciously, the mind is not. With our mind, we make choices and decisions consciously. It’s so important that we keep our mind set on the things of God so that when our heart wants to lead us astray, our mind makes the choice to reject the heart’s leaning.

In James 3, the example is given of very large ships being driven by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. This illustration, in its context, is used to compare the rudder to our tongue. To expand that thought, the tongue is driven by our mind, for our tongue says what our mind thinks. So, as the will of the ship’s pilot directs the rudder, so our will (mind) directs our actions and words. We’re faced with choices every day. We choose to spend time with God studying His Word and praying, we choose to allow Him to fill us with His power and His love, we choose to work hard, we choose to be kind to others, etc.

First Chronicles 28:9 says, *“As for you, Solomon, my son, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands the intention of every thought.”* What a reminder this is to me to serve God, who my daddy and my mother served and taught me about, and to remember that God searches my heart and understands the intention of my every thought. I may think that my intentions or motives are pure, but God knows if they really are. I can persuade myself, but if I examine my own thoughts and motives, God can show me whether they really are pure.

Look back at the scripture above and notice the phrase, *“with a whole heart and a willing mind.”* In many scriptures, the heart and mind are linked together. There’s obviously a strong connection between the two. We also see this in the passage that says, *“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* We treasure with our mind what we treasure with our heart. A

simple way to put it is that my mind is focused on God because my heart is devoted to Him. The opposite can also be true, so we must guard the devotion of our heart and mind.

Tommy has a question he frequently asks one of us in questioning our ideas or actions. It is, “What’s driving that?” What he means is, “What is the thought behind that or where is that really coming from?” If we really examine our mind, we can sometimes trace a desire or an action to an intention that is either pure or impure. It’s with our mind that we make choices and determine, like the ship’s rudder, where we will go. The mind has the ability to recognize impure motives and cast them aside with the help of the Holy Spirit. When we do recognize these impure motives, we should stop and confess them to God and ask for His forgiveness and help in setting us back on the right track.

There’s one part that the mind plays in many lives that is such a waste of time and energy. I have known people, and I’m sure you have, as well, who try to manipulate others, especially family members, to do what they want them to do. Their mind seems to be constantly working to figure out how they can manipulate situations to their advantage. How much better spent their time and energy would be allowing God to take care of situations and the actions of others and focusing instead of what God wants them to do.

Another needless activity of the mind is worry. Jesus’ own words regarding worry are recorded in Matthew 6:25-34: *“This is why I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the sky: they don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they? Can any of you add a single cubit to his height by worrying? And why do you worry about clothes? Learn how the wildflowers of the field grow; they don’t labor or spin thread. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these! If that’s how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t He do much more for you—you of little faith? So don’t worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For the idolaters eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. Therefore don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

Another passage concerning worry is found in Philippians 4:6-7: *“Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* We see in both of these passages the correlation between worry and trust. A worrying mind is absent of trust in God. However, a trust in God gives us a mind free from worry. We either trust God or we don’t; it’s that simple. And there’s a huge benefit for us when we choose to trust God. Isaiah 26:3 says, *“You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.”*

Let me repeat, it’s with our mind that we choose to trust God and obey Him. Love is a choice, trusting is a choice, obeying is a choice. And the choice is made with the mind. That’s why it’s

so very important that we meditate on God's Word. It should be our mind's default—where our mind automatically goes when it's not engaged in an activity in front of us.

One day I had Kora, our dog, out in the yard on the leash and I was standing in the middle of the front yard, allowing her a good span of room to run. Even though she had plenty of room within the circumference of the area the leash would extend, she kept pulling harder and harder to go outside that area. I was determined she was not going to pull me around the yard, so I kept having to pull her back. I thought to myself, "I wish God had us on a leash so He could just pull us back when we want to go outside His will. Then I realized that He does—it's the Holy Spirit; only He doesn't force us back. We have the choice to stay in His will or go outside it. But He does prompt us just like the tug on the leash. My mind chooses whether or not to follow the tug.

So how do we love God with all our mind? We focus our mind on the things of God—meditating on His Word, seeking His will and His way in everything we do, trusting Him to meet our needs and direct our steps, and praising Him continually. We refuse to allow Satan a stronghold on our mind to divert our attention and steal our joy. We choose the joy and peace that God has to offer and we allow Him to shine through us, giving us passion to live this life He has granted us.

Examine: What would you say is the default of your mind? Can you recall a time when your heart wanted to do one thing, but your mind led it in another direction? What was the result? Are you a worrier? What would it take for you to choose to trust God? Are you willing to do that?

Prayer for today: Lord, please help me today to keep my mind focused on You and help me to use my mind to keep my heart in check. Bring to my mind words of scripture throughout the day that apply to the various situations I face, words that will direct me and encourage me and make me useful to You. Help me to choose trust over worry. Give me passion which comes from Your joy and peace so that others will clearly see You in me. In Jesus' precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: "*Set your mind on what is above, not on what is on earth.*" Colossians 3:2

## **DAY 19**

My focus for today is loving God with all my strength. Exodus 15 gives a song that Moses and the Israelites sang after God destroyed Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. Verse 2 says, "*The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation. This is my God and I will praise Him, my father's God, and I will exalt Him.*" Verse 13 says, "*You will lead the people You have redeemed with Your faithful love; You will guide them to Your holy dwelling with Your strength.*" Notice the word "strength" in both verses. God guides us with His strength and then His strength becomes our strength so that we can say, "The Lord is my strength." When we do anything with all our strength, we pour everything we have into it—every bit of the energy we have. So to love God with all our strength means to pour every ounce of our energy and power into our relationship with Him, to love Him with every fiber of our being. Sure, our strength, even at its

best, is weak, but God will pour His strength into us to enable us to love Him more than we possibly can on our own.

Psalm 28:7 says, *“The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped. Therefore my heart rejoices, and I praise Him with my song.”* We cannot live the godly life that’s pleasing to God in our own strength. God never intended or created us to do that. He created us with limitations so that we would have to depend on Him and so that we would see Him involved in our lives.

Years ago I listened to an interview with a doctor from the Minirth-Meier Clinic who said that there was no such thing as burnout in the life of a Christian living in God’s will and His strength. He said that when God gives the strength, it does not run out. Thus, burnout comes from our attempting to do God’s work in our own strength. That leads to frustration and exhaustion because we simply were not created to be able to do His work with our strength. Merriam-Webster’s definition of burnout is, “exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration.” When we allow God to strengthen us, we’re able to overlook or deal effectively with situations that could otherwise cause stress or frustration. This is taught in Isaiah 40:31: *“but those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint.”* We can renew our strength daily so that it doesn’t run dry. God’s strength is unlimited. God’s Word does not teach that we’ll never get physically tired; after all, He created these bodies with physical limitations. He knows we need rest because we do get tired. One requirement of taking care of the temple God gave us is to get adequate rest; then when we’ve done our part by doing that and by filling our mind with His Word, He will do His part by strengthening us to do His work.

I’ve heard the saying, “God doesn’t call the equipped; He equips the called.” His strength is His equipping us to do what He calls us to do. First Peter 4:11 says, *“If anyone speaks, his speech should be like the oracles of God; if anyone serves, his service should be from the strength God provides, so that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong the glory and the power forever and ever, amen.”* So, if I serve God in the strength He provides, the result is that He and His power are glorified, not me.

The secret or key to living in God’s strength is found in John 15:4-5: *“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”* Sure, we can do a few good things in our own power, but the things done with God’s power are the things that have eternal value. They are the deeds or rewards that will not burn in the judgment. First Corinthians 3:12-15 says, *“If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, each one’s work will become obvious for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one’s work. If anyone’s work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, it will be lost, but he will be saved; yet it will be like an escape through fire.”* This alone should be enough to compel us to serve God with His strength and not our own.

Bruce Wilkinson tells a story of an event in his life in his book, *Secrets of the Vine*, that is so applicable to all of us, especially those of us from middle age and older. He tells that he suddenly felt that he'd been working harder and longer, but he had less to show for it. He talked it over with his wife, Darlene, and said, "By bedtime we had come to the disturbing conclusion that the passion I used to feel about serving God had been in decline for some time." Over the next few days, as he prayed, God led him to contact a man he'd met more than ten years earlier. He flew to the West Coast to meet with him and what the man told him was that he was "right on schedule." What he explained to Bruce was that when anyone starts out in ministry, their competence is low, so they have to depend on God. Then gradually, as God leads them and gives them success, they feel their competence increasing and this continues to the point that they depend on God less and less. Their time with Him decreases as they work harder in their own competence. However, their work becomes less rewarding and successful for God's glory because He's not empowering them. This is so common among Christians. When we get to the point, and it's a gradual process, that we are attempting to do God's work with our strength, we will fall flat on our faces and all of that work will burn one day. It's only the work done in God's strength that will survive His judgment.

Psalm 28:7 says, "*The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped. Therefore my heart rejoices, and I praise Him with my song.*" To summarize what it means to love God with all my strength, we must acknowledge the first five words of this verse: "*The Lord is my strength...*" When I trust Him, He becomes my strength; therefore, I am able to love Him with all my strength. Look closely and consider the last sentence of this verse to see the result of the Lord being my strength: "*Therefore my heart rejoices, and I praise Him with my song.*" What a beautiful picture of a life given to God, serving Him in His strength and with a heart full of praise to Him!

Examine: Think about ways you've served God over the past week. Do you feel you've served Him in His strength or your own? Our strength comes from our trust in God, so how would you rate your level of trust in God—your ability to turn your problems and your actions over to Him and know that He will take care of you and guide you? If you determine that you have room to grow in this area, what do you intend to do about it?

Prayer for today: Lord, I acknowledge that my flesh is weak and that I cannot serve You on my own in a way that brings eternal value. I really do want to accomplish things that are of eternal value rather than only things that will not matter once my life is over. I ask You to help me to trust You and depend on You to accomplish those things that truly make a difference for eternity, those things that bring honor and glory to You and, therefore, point others to You. May those around me see You in me, especially Your power and love, and be inspired and encouraged to follow You, as well. Lord, help me to truly love You with all my strength and to love others with a love that comes from Your strength, which is the only true love. In Jesus' precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: "*The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped. Therefore my heart rejoices, and I praise Him with my song.*" Psalm 28:7

## DAY 20

Here is a summary of the key points we have considered this week concerning loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength—a love that gives us passion for Him.

1. Heart – *“I have treasured Your word in my heart so that I may not sin against You.”* (Psalm 119:11) My heart is that part of me that treasures God, that causes me to long for Him and His instruction.
2. Soul – *“O God, You are my God; earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You;”* (Psalm 63:1a) From my soul, the very core of my being, I will crave a deep, abiding relationship with God.
3. Mind – *“Set your minds on what is above, not on what is on earth.”* (Colossians 3:2) My mind set on God is what causes me to make choices, decisions, that are in line with God’s Word and His will.
4. Strength – *“but those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint.”* (Isaiah 40:31) With all my strength, I will love God and when my strength gives out, His strength takes over. He is my strength and I will allow His strength to have control over me.

When we think of a passionate love on a physical level, we picture two people so in love that they are consumed with each other. On a higher, spiritual level, passionate love for God is all-consuming love that controls our every thought and action; it’s what drives us to seek Him and serve Him to make Him known to others. It’s what makes us want to spend time with him, not out of duty, but out of sheer devotion and love for Him.

Do you have a mission statement that guides you in your day-to-day life? If not, ask God to give you one that will help keep you focused on Him and filled to overflowing with Him and the power of His Holy Spirit. Following is my mission statement that I’m giving you to show you how it guides me in focusing on God and His will for my life and to encourage you to develop what you believe God has given you as your mission.

To LIVE life to the fullest by doing the following:

LOVE God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength and to love others with His love that flows through me.

INSPIRE others to live in a way that brings a smile to the face of God.

VALUE others as people loved by God that they are.

ENCOURAGE others to press on toward the prize God has placed before them.

I pray this mission statement almost every morning and ask God to help me focus on it as I go throughout my day, looking for ways to fulfill it. This, coupled with my time spent in Bible study, gives me passion for God and serving Him. Of course, we’re human and we won’t always

“feel” passionately in love with God, but in those times we can choose to come back to Him and re-establish our focus on His thoughts and His ways and ask Him to fill us to overflowing with His love.

Examine: Would you say that you are passionately in love with God? If so, what are you doing to cause that? Ask God to take your love for Him to an even greater level. If not, ask God to give you that kind of love—a love so deep that you cannot wait to spend time with Him every day and that compels you to serve Him by loving others as he loves them.

Prayer for today: Lord God, I deeply love You and praise You. You are my life, not just a part of my life, but You ARE my life. Please fill me to overflowing with Your love so much that it overflows onto everyone I come in contact with today. I pray that those around me will see Your light in my eyes and Your presence in me through Your Holy Spirit working in the words I say, the attitudes I manifest, and the actions I do. Help me to meditate on Your Word today and live it out in all I do. In Jesus’ precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: *“but those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint.”* (Isaiah 40:31)

## **DAY 21**

Here is a summary of the key things God has taught us over these 21 days:

1. Daily ask God to create in us a clean heart and to search our heart and show us any unrighteousness, then confess and repent. *“Create in me a clean heart, O God.”* (Psalm 51:10a) We should always keep a check on our heart to insure that our motives are pure and our heart is willing to do anything God leads us to do.
2. Continually ask God to direct our steps and be open to His leading. *“Trust in the Lord your God and lean not on your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path.”* (Proverbs 3:5-6) Remember to have the heart of a sheep who humbly submits to the leadership of the shepherd. Remember also that we’re to obey God’s leading even when we don’t understand it; it’s not important that we understand it, but it is important that we obey. We’re also told to acknowledge God in all our ways—to constantly ask His opinion and to give Him credit for what He does. We can rest assured that He will direct our path when we seek Him and trust Him.
3. Daily ask God to empower us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength so that everything we do will be done with passion and zeal for Him. *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”* (Matthew 22:37) Be sure that our service comes from an overflow of His love and His character poured in and through us and that we are serving Him with passion.

Because God gave us the best that He had, His only Son, Jesus, we owe Him our very best—not our leftovers or just a part of our heart or our energy, but the very best that we have and all that

we have. Think about what you offer God. Do you offer Him the first part of your day? Do you offer Him the first fruits of your labor? Do you offer Him all that you are and all that you have? God deserves to BE our life, not a part of our life; he should not be a compartment of our life, but should be over every compartment of our life. My prayer as we conclude this study is that we will all allow Him full control of our lives so that He has the freedom to guide us and use us according to His plan and that we truly love Him with every fiber of our being.

Examine: What have you learned from studying God's Word over these 21 days? What difference will this make in your life? What do you plan to change? If you have fasted, what benefits have you experienced from your 21-day fast?

Prayer for today: Lord, thank you so much for giving me insight over the past three weeks. Thank you for making this 21-day fast one of rich fellowship with You. Please don't let me forget what You have taught me. Help this to be a life-changing time and also a practice that I do frequently. Help me to love You more and to have an even greater desire to not work for You, but to work with You as You lead me and enable me. I love You. In Jesus' precious name I pray, amen.

Meditation for today: *"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."* (Psalm 42:1-2a)